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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS, AVIAN FLU

¶1. Summary: Major Chinese-language Taipei dailies focused their coverage November 8 on the arrest of a famous poet who threatened Premier Frank Hsieh by phone last week, local scandals, and Taiwan's financial assistance to Senegal, which severed diplomatic ties with Taiwan in late October. Almost all newspapers also reported in their inside pages the pan-Blue legislators' move at a joint meeting of the Legislative Yuan's National Defense Committee and Budget Committee Monday to cut the Taiwan Defense Ministry's NT\$272 million budget for the preparatory spending of the U.S. arms procurement bill.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" criticized the DPP government's "effective management, proactive opening" policy with regard to Taiwan's investments in China. The article urged the DPP administration not to make a big mistake at this critical moment and let China dominate Taiwan's cross-Straight policy. An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" discussed Taiwan's plan to prevent the possible outbreak of avian flu. End summary.

¶1. Cross-Straight Relations

"Do Not Make a Big Historic Mistake at This Critical Moment"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] asserted in an editorial (11/8):

". Ever since [Chinese President] Hu Jintao came into power, he has been pushing even harder and becoming more insistent on the one China principle while, at the same time, [playing the game of] `acting more softly with regard to soft matters.' The united-front approach [by Beijing] is by no means a good-will gesture to Taiwan; instead, it is a skillful two-pronged strategy to launch an attack against Taiwan from different directions.

"China is attempting to take away the power of the Taiwan government by not dealing directly with the island's elected government. China has avoided holding talks with our government on an equal footing with regard to issues such as [cross-Straight] chartered flights for the Chinese New Year and zero tariffs for imported Taiwanese agricultural products; instead, it has gone directly to Taiwan's private sector and opposition parties. China's aim has been nothing but to belittle Taiwan's sovereign state and force Taiwan to accept this reality. The pace of the Taiwan government's cross-Straight policy, in the meantime, seems to be dominated by China, too. The fact that Taiwan's cross-Straight policy is controlled by China is by no means favorable to Taiwan. .

"According to observations by this newspaper, our government has actively opened [Taiwan's investments in China] to an extent that it seems it has placed no restriction whatsoever [on such investments]. Although this development was partially due to the push of pro-China forces [on the island], still, it takes two to tango. If our government did not want to speculate and take advantage of [China's blossoming market], mistakenly thinking that this is a way to improve Taiwan's economic situation, how would Taiwan have ended up losing all its capital and firms? If our authorities had not dreamed of meeting Hu Jintao, how would it have allowed [former KMT Chairman] Lien Chan and [PFP Chairman] James Soong to go to China to join hands with the Chinese Communist Party in restraining Taiwan and thereby introducing China's influence into the political competition in Taiwan? Moreover, if our government had not insisted on opening [Taiwan's investment in China], how would the pan-Blue people and pro-unification media outlets have used the so-called alleviated cross-Straight situation as an excuse for blocking the special arms procurement [from the United States]? ."

¶2. Avian Flu

"Heed Alarms of Killer Flu"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] said in an editorial (11/8):

". Taiwan plans to spend NT\$30 billion (US\$890 million) to cope with a possible outbreak [of avian flu], which could infect 5.3 million people in the island, send 70,000 people to hospital and kill about 14,000 of them. And it has succeeded in developing its own anti-bird flu drug and will begin mass-production of Tamiflu (oseltamivir), the most effective treatment so far, in December, well before the anticipated eruption next spring. .

"So far, only Taiwan has formally asked Roche for permission to produce the drug. If Roche refuses to sub-license Taipei, Taipei will invoke the right of nations under international trade treaties to break patents during health emergencies and go ahead with the production anyway. After all, human life is more important than patents. Tamiflu currently costs US\$60 for a course of treatment. .

"The SARS virus has killed less than 1,000 people worldwide, not millions as had been forecast. The 'swine flu' hysteria in the U.S. in the 1970s, the anthrax threat and the 2000 'millennium bug' that was supposed to shut down the world all turned out to be false alarms. Alarms are annoying. But better be annoyed than harmed."

KEEGAN